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The Lost Navigators;

Or, Frank Reade, Jr.'s Mid-Air Search
With His New Air-Ship, the
"Sky Flyer."

By "NONAME."



Barney tumbled the foremost from his horse. Pomp took the next. The remnant of the giants on foot had retreated before the deadly fire of the Winchesters. Barney and Pomp realized that it was only a question of ammunition.

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The Lost Navigators;

OR,

FRANK READE, JR.'S MID-AIR SEARCH WITH HIS NEW AIR-SHIP, THE "SKY FLYER."

A STORY OF WONDERFUL ADVENTURE.

By "NONAME,"

Author of "In the Black Zone," "The Unknown Sea," "Over the Steppes," etc., etc.

CHAPTER I.

FRANK READE, JR., the famous inventor and explorer, with whose fame every one is familiar, had just completed his new air-ship.

The Sky Flyer he called it, and it eclipsed all his previous efforts in that direction. It was a marvel of beauty and mechanism.

The young inventor stood alone as the discoverer of a system of aerial navigation. Scores of other inventors had partly solved the problem, but it had been left for Frank Reade, Jr., to perfect it absolutely.

In the first place, he had laid the lines of a very light and narrow craft, something after the architecture of a yacht. The stern was round, and high and the bow long and sharp pointed.

This hull Frank had constructed of the lightest and strongest metals known, aluminum of course being the principal material used.

When the hull was completed it could easily be lifted by two men, so extremely light was it. Then he began to calculate upon the various forces of resistance in the atmosphere which he must overcome, and also the most powerful method of aeroplanes to make the craft rise.

He discarded the aeroplane theory for the revolving rotascopes, the blades having a reversible action which was sufficient to hold many times the weight of the air-ship in suspension.

Three of these rotascopes were placed upon revolving masts. Then the propeller was made of four revolving paddles, very similar to the propeller of a steam vessel. Also from the foremast a huge sail was rigged to steady and add speed to the air-ship in a high wind.

These problems solved, Frank next turned his thoughts to a propelling or motive power. Of course electricity was at once suggested to him. He was familiar with this mighty subject.

From the fertility of his brain he evolved a storage system which enabled him to use powerful dynamos to drive the rotascopes and propeller. This last problem settled, the rest was easy.

The appointments and fitting up of the air-ship was par excellence.

There was a main cabin, an after cabin, several state-rooms, cooking galley and other compartments, including the pilot house. In this latter was the electric key-board, where the operator could sit and by a system of levers and push buttons direct the entire mechanism of the boat. This was wonderful enough.

To attempt to describe the equipments of the Sky Flyer in detail might be tedious. All will be evolved in the course of our story and with this introductory description of the new air-ship let us hasten on to exciting incidents of our story.

For Frank Reade, Jr., had planned a hazardous aerial trip.

One day, just after completing the Sky Flyer, he saw the following thrilling paragraph in the daily newspaper:

"No tidings have as yet been received from the balloon navigators, who with Dr. Jansen have undertaken to cross the region of the Ant-

arctic and reach the South Pole in the car of a specially constructed balloon.

"The last seen of the distinguished savant and his balloon, the 'Republic,' was when he left the northern point of Enderby Land, and was borne by air-currents to the southward.

"Sufficient time has elapsed for the balloon to have covered the Antarctic region several times, and in the natural course of events, the Republic should be putting in its appearance about this time in the vicinity of Porpoise Bay, which is just south of Australia. It was at this point the learned doctor expected to emerge from the unexplored Polar Region.

"But a great length of time has elapsed and no tidings have been received. In the car of the balloon were carrier pigeons, but none of these have returned. There were also a number of high pressure miniature balloons which were to be liberated should the Republic meet with a disaster.

"All these means of communication have failed to develop. The fact remains that Jansen and his party sailed pluckily into the unknown, and the chance of their fate ever becoming known is exceedingly slight.

"There is some talk of a relief expedition, but just how this could be directed is not clear. The party in the car of the lost balloon, consists of Dr. Julius Jansen, F. R. A.—S. I.—R. A. S., and other societies; Pierre Vadeau, the famous French botanist; Justus Von Meyer, the distinguished German mineralogist, and Theodore Bunce, the famous English geographer. It is not impossible that time may yet prove that the distinguished party of scientists will emerge triumphantly from their venturesome expedition. This is the hope of their friends."

It was but natural that Frank Reade, Jr., should become at once intensely interested in this wonderful story. He pictured the lost navigators in sore distress in the land of ice, and his whole soul went out to them.

"They should be rescued," he declared; "they have risked their lives for the benefit of mankind and it is too bad to let them perish so miserably."

Frank was not alone in this philanthropic assumption. His two faithful co-workers and assistants, Barney and Pomp, were with him.

"Be me sowl," exclaimed the good natured Irishman, "av there won't nobody else go to help thim, yez ought to go yeisilf, Mistrer Frank."

"Golly! dat would jes' be a nice trip fo' de new air ship!" averred Pomp.

Frank was thoughtful a moment. Then he said:

"You may be right, friends. I will give the matter serious thought."

And he did. That night he hardly closed his eyes in sleep. When morning came he was decided.

He went down to the great machine works and visited the yard where the Sky Flyer rested upon its stocks.

He went over the air-ship carefully, and when he had inspected everything about it he made his way to his private draughting room near the gate. Here he met Barney.

The Celt ducked his red-head and grinned all over his jolly face.

"Mornin' to yez, Misther Frank," he cried. "I hope yez slept well lasht noight."

"On the contrary, I did not sleep at all," replied Frank.

"Faith sor, an' phwy was that?"

"I have been trying to make up my mind about that Antarctic trip in quest of those lost navigators."

"And can't yez make it up, sor?"

"Yes."

The Celt turned a hand-spring.

"I knew yez would, sor!" he cried.

"I have decided to go!"

"Whurroo!"

The Celt bounded away toward the machine shops to tell the workmen and his colleague Pomp. But Frank cried:

"Hold on, you rascal!"

Barney stopped short.

"Well, sor?"

"I have some orders for you."

"All right, sor."

"I want you and Pomp to have the air ship all ready for the start with two days. Do you understand?"

"Shure, sor."

"Have all supplies and effects on board. In two days we shall start from this very yard. Now don't fail."

"Divil a bit, sor!"

And away went the Celt. Frank smiled grimly and went into his office. There he worked for some hours.

When he came out he had the satisfaction of knowing that all his affairs were in ship shape order, and he was free to go where he pleased.

In two days the air ship was to start. Of course the report went abroad, and considerable interest was created.

From all the great scientific societies Frank received letters of gratitude and approbation. The most effective epistle he received was from the wife of Doctor Jansen, supplemented by a prayer from little Hilda, the lost explorer's child.

Frank replied, assuring the distraught wife and little girl that he would do all in his power to find Doctor Jansen, and expressed a well-warranted belief that he would succeed. This was indeed a balm for the sorrowing hearts.

At last the day of departure came.

A large crowd congregated in Readestown to see the air ship mount into the clouds. Barney and Pomp were right in their element.

Indeed, so exuberant were their feelings, that they could not resist the impulse for a rough and tumble of which they were fond.

Barney made some sharp and caustic remark to which Pomp took exceptions. In a moment they were at it hammer and tongs.

"Look out dar, honey," screamed Pomp, lowering his head and making a rush at Barney. "I'se acomin'!"

"I see yez are," roared the Celt; "well, go an wid yez!"

And Pomp did go on.

The Celt had dodged and the coon went head first into a tank of very dirty water which was used by the iron workers in cooling their molds.

When he scrambled out he was in appearance and temper very much like a wet hen.

"Hi—hi, fush—splash—whish! b-r-r-r-rugh! I fix ye' fo' dat, I'ish! Hi, dar! look out fo' de batterin' ram!"

"Ha—ha—ha!" roared Barney, in a literal paroxysm. "Did yez iver get left? Oho, that's the funniest yit. Whurroo!"

The next moment he grappled with the coon who was close upon him. Then ensued the rough and tumble.

Not until both were exhausted did they desist. Even then it was Frank Reade, Jr.'s voice calling them which terminated the affair.

Away they scrambled and soon were at their posts aboard the air-ship. Frank was bidding farewell to his friends at the gangway.

Then the young inventor sprang briskly aboard, and made a signal to Barney in the pilot house. The Celt pressed the rotoscope lever.

Up shot the air-ship. Three thousand feet it went into the verge of the clouds. Readestown looked like an abode of pygmies. Then the propeller began to turn. The great trip was begun.

CHAPTER II.

SOUTHWARD BOUND.

ACTUAL experience alone can give one a proper realization of the sensations experienced in aerial navigation.

So far above the earth in the rarefied atmosphere, naught but buoyant spirits could result. The voyagers on board the Sky Flyer were thus impressed.

Of course the sensation was by no means new to Barney and Pomp; yet they were fond of looking over the rail and watching the panorama of landscape below.

It was an ever changing one and of the greatest interest. Towns, hamlets and cities, plains, rivers, lakes and mountains were speeding by the line of vision.

But at length the mighty expanse of the sea burst into view. The first water encountered was the Gulf of Mexico.

"We shall pass directly over the West India islands," declared Frank, "and follow the coast of the South American Continent all the way to Cape Horn. Thence we will strike for the Atlantic Circle and the region beyond."

"Bejabers, that must be quite aways, sor!" declared Barney.

"Well, it is!" agreed Frank. "We shall not make it under a month."

The trip across the Gulf was of much interest. Frank altered the course a trifle so that they could get a glimpse of the City of Havana.

Cuba was rent with war, and as the voyagers gazed down upon the towers of ancient Morro Castle they indulged in various smiles:

"Be me gowl, this Cuban war makes me think av the position av ould Oireland?" declared Barney, "only shure the poor Oirishmen had not the chance to fight these Cubans had. Av we had, Oireland wud have been free long since!"

"Cuba is sure to gain her freedom in the end," averred Frank.

"Golly! I reckon Uncle Sam ought to set Cuba free, jes' de same as he set de slaves free in de Civil war!" declared Pomp, sensibly.

"Begorra, he's aither thryin' to do as well as he kin 'widout thubble," laughed Barney; "shure wud yez luk at the moighty lot av filibusterin' there is goin' on all the toime."

"So you think Uncle Sam winks at a good deal, do you, Barney?" asked Frank, with a smile.

"Shure, an' I do, sor!"

"Well, you are partly right!"

Frank allowed the air ship to descend somewhat as they were passing over the interior of the island. On every hand evidences of the fearful effects of cruel war could be seen.

There were the ashes of haciendas and sugar mills, the ruined fields of sugar cane and tobacco, the dismantled towns and devastated farms.

In many places the people lived in burrows in the ground, in caves and rude huts in the jungle. And amid all were the camps of the deadly trocha line, which extended across the island.

Poor suffering Cuba!

The flashy uniforms of the Spanish were everywhere to be seen, but presently the scene changed.

The plantations gave way to jungles and swamps. Here and there were heights or islands in the low lying country.

Upon these eminences there were grouped the camps of the patriots. These were huts and cabins of cane and brush. The grazing lands were covered with horses.

The flashy uniforms were not to be seen, but the dull colored suits of the rebels were fully in keeping with the grim determination of their souls.

They were better organized, better grouped and were easily seen to be individually the superiors of the Spanish troops.

"Those men you can easily see are fighters," declared Frank; "they are inured to hardship; experience in wild life has made them accurate marksmen and they cannot be defeated."

"Golly! I'se bound to believe dat, Marse Frank!" cried Pomp.

"Shure, it's luck I wish them, an' may they lick the hull lot av the black Spaniards," cried Barney.

It required fully a half day to cross the isle of Cuba. As its shores finally faded away to the northward, the sky became dark and night rapidly settled down over the sea.

The air-ship, however, could easily keep on her way. Barney and Pomp alternately slept and navigated the air-ship, and in this way her progress was not deterred.

South of Cuba was the Island of Jamaica, but Frank bore a trifle to the east of this.

Many sailing vessels were seen of all nationalities. In all cases a signal was made the air ship.

Frank answered with a flag lowered over the stern of the Sky Flyer. In some cases a salute was even fired by some vessel of war.

Across the Caribbean Sea the voyagers journeyed, and in due course sighted the northern coast of South America. The land was Venezuela.

They were now well upon their way to the Equator. The tropical atmosphere demanded a different manner of living.

The sun beat down fiercely hot, and the voyagers were glad enough to spread an awning over the deck. Under this they sat in the daytime.

At night the air was balmy and fragrant. To sit out on the deck and enjoy it was a keen pleasure.

It was then that Barney would bring out his fiddle and play a medley of Irish jigs and ballads. While Pomp, not to be outdone, would produce his banjo and render some genuine plantation songs and clogs, which were par excellence.

The trip through the tropics was one to be enjoyed and long remembered. When just over the Equator Pomp prepared an elaborate spread, and the voyagers celebrated the occasion in a rational manner.

South of the Equator the wildest country imaginable was encountered.

The Selvas of the Amazon were first encountered. These impressed the voyagers greatly.

Soloman's River, or the Amazon, wended its sluggish way among the great forest marshes, overhanging with vines, and filled with chattering monkeys and birds of rare plumage.

Then, beyond the Maderia, the highlands of Brazil came into view. Here were recesses never visited by white man, where the aborigine Indian lived in his favorite seclusion. There were high mountains and deep gulches, canyons and valleys.

Then along the boundary line of Bolivia they traced their way until the plains of the Grand Chaco lay beneath them.

Stretching to the southward as far as the vision could reach these Pampas were a wonderful spectacle.

"The North American prairie is not in the same class with the Chaco!" declared Frank. "What can equal it?"

The great Pampas grasses half hid the forms of herds of wild cattle and with their immense white plumes gave the appearance of great stretches of snow.

But in places where the fire had swept its deadly course, (for the Pampas is constantly ravaged by fire,) there were smooth, green spots upon which the cattle grazed, or antelopes herded.

The guanaco, a species of wild goat peculiar to Patagonia, was rare upon the open plains, its stamping ground being largely in the rocky hills to the far west.

Far off on the horizon the great fiery wall of a Pampas fire could be seen. It was a remarkable spectacle.

"Be me sowl!" exclaimed Barney, "I belave I cud shoot wan av them wild antelopes av we cud git a bit nearer."

"Golly! dat would jes' be fine. We ain' had no fresh meat fo' a long time," declared Pomp.

"It shall be done!" declared Frank; "get your rifles ready!"

Barney and Pomp delighted at the prospect scampered away to get their rifles. In a few moments they returned.

Frank had allowed the air-ship to slowly sink, trying to bring the antelopes within easy range. But this proved a difficult thing.

They showed plainly that they were fearfully afraid of the strange apparition in the sky.

It was likely that they took it for some big bird of prey, and it was certain that they were not going to be trapped by it.

They made off at a lively pace, and all attempts to approach them were failures. Barney and Pomp were disappointed.

"Well," said Frank, finally, in disgust, "it is plain that we are not going to get them this way. There is no other way but to hunt them in the old-fashioned way!"

As they had been a long while in mid-air, and had not as yet set foot upon the ground since leaving home, none in the party were averse to trying the change. So Frank selected a suitable spot and lowered the Sky Flyer.

"I will stay here and look after the air-ship," he said; "and you fellows may do the hunting. Only be sure and return as soon as you can!"

"To be shure we will!" cried Barney.

The two jokers were delighted with the prospect. They quickly prepared for the expedition and set forth.

The air-ship rested upon a green spot just in the verge of the Pampas grass district. So high was this grass that only the rotascopes could be seen above it from a distance.

Equipped for the antelope hunt, Barney and Pomp set out across the "bum" or smooth plain. As yet not an antelope was in sight.

They tramped on sturdily for some miles. The undulations of the plain hid the air-ship from sight.

But the two hunters had made special mark of the points of the compass and did not reckon upon getting lost. They were constantly upon the lookout for game.

But as yet none had appeared. However, just as Barney's patience was getting sorely tried, Pomp clutched his arm.

"Phwat's the matter, naygur?"

"Sh! Does yo' see dat fing ober dere nigh to de line ob high grass? I done believe dat am an antelope's head."

Barney squinted at the object and then dropped upon all fours.

"Shure yez are roight," he agreed. "Yez kin bear off to the roight, naygur. Crawl up aisy now."

"Yo' kin bet I will."

They had noted the direction of the wind, which was in their favor. They now felt sure of success.

Nearer to the grazing antelope they crept. There were fully a dozen in the herd, and they were beauties.

It was slow work, but after much labor they managed to get within passable distance. They dared go no nearer, and Barney motioned to Pomp to shoot.

Each raised his rifle and took deliberate aim. But before they could fire a curious thing happened.

CHAPTER III.

THE PATAGONIANS.

THE antelopes were distant about three hundred yards.

This ought not ordinarily to be a difficult shot with a rifle. Both Barney and Pomp were good marksmen.

The deer were quite near the verge of the Pampas grass. Suddenly they took fright and sped away. This was before either of the two hunters could pull trigger.

But not before a powerful half naked form had sprung out of the Pampas grass like a hound and thrown a curious sling, much like that used to hunt ostriches with.

It described a lightning-like parabola and swung with crushing force across the neck of a fine antelope. The creature went down instantly.

The sling consisted apparently of two heavy stones, one at each end of a rope, about five feet in length. So expert was the thrower that the rope would wind about the neck of the antelope and the weight of the stones would shut off the creature's wind.

This species of sling is as old as creation having been used by prim-

itive man. And indeed Barney and Pomp were by no means sure that it was not a specimen of the latter which was now before them.

A perfect giant in stature he was, being full seven feet in height, with large head and features and tangled hair of black. His limbs, half naked were powerful.

For a moment he paused after throwing the sling. Then he made a caper and gave a deep, hoarse cry.

Instantly from the Pampas grass a half dozen others of his type appeared. A more formidable array of barbarians could hardly be imagined.

Barney and Pomp were thunderstruck. They simply lay where they were and watched these strange natives.

"Bejabers, that's quare!" muttered Barney, "did yez iver see the loike, naygur?"

"Golly! dey am de bigges' men I eber see!" agreed the coon.

"Phwat are we goin' to do?"

"Kain't say, honey. If we moves too much dey done fo' shuah see us."

"That's so, naygur. Och, hone, I wudn't have them iver get a howld on me fer all the antelope in South Ameriky!"

"Nor me either, chile," agreed Pomp. "I done fink we ought to tell Marse Frank about dis."

"How the devil kin we do that, sor, whin, if we make a move, they'll be afther seein' us fer shure?"

So it was decided that they should stay where they were and await developments. And this was sensible.

The giants—for such they were—held an excited confab over the deer for some moments. The animal, prostrated by the sling, had been dispatched with the stone club of the giant hunter.

Then the antelope was picked up and lightly thrown across the back of one of the giants, with which all turned and vanished into the pampas grass.

Barney and Pomp remained a long time in their cramped position ere they could feel sure that the coast was clear.

Then they rose to their feet, and for a moment stood facing each other, sorely in doubt what to do.

Both were in a state of some terror. They were not cowards, but these unknown beings of such formidable stature were a puzzle to them.

They experienced an uncontrollable desire to get away from their vicinity.

So they started away at full speed into the open plain. Not until one of its undulations hid them from the spot did they draw a breath of relief.

"Golly!" exclaimed Pomp, "dem was jes' de bigges' men I ever seed in all mah life!"

"Be me sowl, they're nigh as big as the giants av Fingal," declared Barney; "shure, they war the biggest in the woruld."

They trudged on for some while until another drove of antelope was spotted. Barney took a long shot and killed one of these.

It was a beautiful animal, and would furnish steak for the party. So the two hunters were satisfied.

It was proposed to return at once to the air-ship. But just as they had finished quartering the antelope Barney grabbed his rifle.

"Mither av Moses!" he gasped. "We're in fer it, naygur! Wud yez luk at the loikes av that?"

But the coon had seen the danger so imminent at the same moment. Over a ridge of land there came on the full run a half score of the giants.

A glance told the truth. Their heads were low bent. They had found the trail of the two hunters and were following it like sleuth hounds.

And as they topped the rise they lifted their heads and saw the objects of their pursuit.

Instantly a wild, hoarse yell went up from their throats. It was terrifying in their intonation.

Down toward the two hunters they swooped. For a moment Barney and Pomp hesitated.

Were they friends or foes? If the former, they certainly did not look it. Their whole appearance was savage.

Barney on the impulse of the moment made gestures warning them back. But one of them hurled a sling at him, which he barely dodged.

This was enough.

"Golly!" exclaimed Pomp, "dere ain' no odder way, chile, but to defend ourselves."

"Yez are roight, naygur. Give it to 'em an' thin fall back!"

Crack-a-ch!

The two rifles spoke and with most deadly effect. Two of the giants threw up their arms and fell.

This puzzled the others apparently, for they halted and bent down over the bodies of their dead comrades. They had seen the flash of the guns and the smoke, but the missile was an invisible one.

What hocus-pocus was this? They were astounded.

But the savage mind, sluggish upon a point beyond their powers of comprehension, is ever vengeful. The death of their comrades soon overmastered their sense of fear or superstition.

They came on again furiously, and with all the more confidence, as Barney and Pomp had been beating a lively retreat.

The situation was one not to the liking of either.

They would much rather have been back aboard the air ship, though it was plain that they held the advantage of their assailants.

The repeaters now did deadly work among the giants. They tumbled rapidly, and their ranks thinned most alarmingly. Thus the fight and pursuit went on for fully a mile.

All this while Barney and Pomp had been working to the eastward. Their one prayer was that Frank Reade, Jr., would hear their rifle shots and come to their relief.

And at this critical juncture a fresh calamity appeared. From the westward a large party of horsemen were seen to be approaching.

They were fully a hundred strong, and were of the same species of barbarian to all appearance. The outlook was a most desperate one.

Barney turned pale, and Pomp would have done so had he been able.

"Golly! I done reckon we're cooked fo' dis trip," cried Pomp, dismissively. "We neber kin stand dem off."

"Be jabers, we've got to do it!" averred Barney, desperately.

"What am yo' plan, I'ish?"

"Do yez see that little hill yonder?"

"I does!"

"Well, Naygur, we've got to git to the top av that and shoot the omadhouns as fast as iver we kin. Do yez see?"

"I'se wif yo', chile."

They fell back to the little eminence. This was, as Barney's keen eye had seen, the only strategic position.

As the mounted giants drew nearer, their appearance was seen to be most peculiar. The horses upon which they were mounted were short of legs and more shaggy than a Shetland.

But they were strong and hardy, else they could never have borne their giant riders. Nearer they came.

Barney tumbled the foremost from his horse. Pomp took the next.

The remnant of the giants on foot had retreated before the deadly fire of the Winchesters. Barney and Pomp realized that it was only a question of ammunition.

With plenty of cartridges they could almost annihilate the giants. But the moment the ammunition failed their fate was sealed.

So they planned to make every shot count. And in this they could not help but succeed.

The mounted giants circled about the eminence on their ponies, not daring to ride to close quarters. This fear, though, might have been overruled in course of time, had it not been for a new intervention.

Suddenly Barney chanced to look up and gave a great shout.

"Whurroo!" he cried. "We're all roight now! Here comes Mistrer Frank to help us out av this!"

Sure enough, far above them was the air-ship. This was in every sense a welcome sight.

Frank had waited what he deemed a reasonable length of time for the return of the hunters.

Then he grew alarmed. Their continued absence could be explained in only one way. Something had happened to them.

After becoming wholly convinced of this, he lost no time in making action. The air-ship was sent up into the air to a height from which Frank could get a good view of the country about.

And as the Sky Flyer sprung aloft there came to his hearing a distant thrilling sound.

It was the crack of firearms. It settled all doubts in his mind. Such a continuity of shots could mean but one thing, and that was that the two jokers were defending themselves against some great peril.

Frank swept the Pampas closely for a view of his two companions. After a while his gaze fell upon a startling spectacle.

He saw a cavalcade of giant riders sweeping over the plain upon their rough-haired ponies. Then he looked further and saw Barney and Pomp.

At once he sent the air-ship forward at full speed. He knew that it was necessary to act with all possible dispatch.

And as the Sky Flyer bore down upon the scene the giants were just closing in upon Barney and Pomp. Frank had come none too soon.

CHAPTER IV.

THE MAGELLAN SETTLEMENT.

At first the giants had not seen the air-ship and recognized in the two men carriole upon the little eminence as legitimate prey.

They urged their horses forward to ride them down.

But at that moment an astounding thing transpired. Down from the clouds there dropped a long rope ladder at the very feet of Barney and Pomp.

And then the air-ship was seen.

The effect of the apparition upon the giants was almost ludicrous. They instantly halted and one and all stared agape at the curious object above them.

What it might have suggested to them it is not easy to guess. Perhaps they thought it a hawk, or a mighty eagle, but in any event it became an instant object of terror.

Upon the level ground and with anything like even terms these Patagonian giants were far from being cowards.

But the air-ship was something beyond their ken. To them it savored of the supernatural.

Panic seized upon them. It was needless for Frank to employ any other means of repulse.

They fell back in great confusion and in a few moments were in wild retreat. Truly it was a hollow victory.

Barney and Pomp had sprung upon the ladder. In an instant they were whisked a hundred feet into the air.

This would have snatched them from the deadly peril in which they were placed without any further effort. The giants fled into the tall pampas grass.

And Barney and Pomp went swiftly up and over the rail onto the deck of the air-ship. They were once more safe.

What was more, the giant foes were far beyond the possibility of doing them any harm. Barney proposed to return for the antelope.

Frank acquiesced, and so it happened that they had venison steak for dinner after all. But both Barney and Pomp had no desire to court another combat with the Patagonian giants.

So further time was not wasted in the vicinity. The air-ship once more headed to the southward.

It was a long reacu, down through Patagonia to bleak Tierra del Fuego, or the Land of Fire. Strange scenes were witnessed and a few minor incidents might be recorded.

But nothing really worth chronicling happened until they were crossing the Strait of Magellan. This is a short cut for slow going vessels in rounding the Horn, and it is seldom that there is not a vessel of some description in these narrow passages of water.

The air-ship hung over the Strait, while Frank was studying the bleak inhospitable shores with his glass.

"On my word," he declared. "I would not care to be exiled to this part of the world. It is a desolate place!"

"Be jabers, that's roight," agreed Barney, "but phwat if yez cud look upon some foine sayside cottages on those rocks, sor, would it not look a bit better?"

"You are right, Barney!" agreed Frank. "I see your point. Our own New England shores must have looked like these to the first comers across the sea. It must have required spartan courage to have settled there!"

"Shure, sor, it's the people that make a country," averred Barney.

"What a mighty lonesome place New York City wud be widout any people."

Frank agreed to this bit of philosophy, and then gave a start.

"Upon my word!" he exclaimed; "what do you call that down there, Barney? It looks like a camp or summer resort."

The Celt also gave a start, and studied closely the little collection of rude shanties just fringing a curious little secluded bit of harbor.

These were the habitations of men, there was no doubt. On the sands were rude boats, one of them having a sail.

That this little settlement was a permanent colony there was no doubt. But Frank was puzzled.

What had brought people to this out-of-the-way part of the world? Who were they, and upon what did they subsist?

These questions were forced upon him, and he became anxious and interested. He determined to find out.

So he lowered the air ship until it was just above the cabins; they presented a mysterious aspect.

About their doors were collected various paraphernalia of a race of fishermen. They were drying nets, wet sails and oars, and a number of freshly dressed fish. Not many minutes previous human beings had been on the spot.

But they were not there now.

The camp was apparently as deserted as if its owners had departed for another sphere. Not a living being was in view.

"Golly!" exclaimed Pomp, "dat am bery queer. Wha' yo' make ob it, Marse Frank?"

"I'm beat," replied the young inventor, frankly.

"Begorra, they've gone off on a picnic or perhaps to ther cirkus," declared Barney, wisely. "Can't yez see how iver that cud be?"

"That may be," agreed Frank, "but I think it is queer. However, let us wait for them to come back."

"Come back, sah?" asked Pomp.

"Yes."

"Yo' reckon dey cum back while youse am here?"

"Why not?"

"Kain't say; but I should fink dey mought be afraid ob us an' stay away."

"Perhaps that is what is keeping them away," said Frank with sudden inspiration. "They may indeed be afraid of us. Well, let us try and gain their confidence if we can."

With this the young inventor began shouting reassuring words. But if the strange settlers of the Magellan Strait were indeed within hearing they did not manifest such a fact.

They did not come forth and show themselves.

An hour passed.

Then Frank could curb his curiosity no longer. He was resolved to inspect the interior of the cabins.

So he said:

"Pomp, you can remain on board while Barney and I inspect these curious abodes. Lower the air-ship upon that shelf or ledge down there, and we will try to solve this mystery."

"A' right, sah!" agreed Pomp as he took his place at the keyboard. Down sank the Sky Flyer.

The air-ship rested safely upon the ledge of rock, and Barney and Frank, well armed, stepped down from the deck. They hesitated but a moment, then boldly approached the cabins.

Frank had no thought of treachery, or of finding these strange settlers in this out-of-the-way part of the world as aught but friends. Their disappearance he attributed either to chance or possibly a superstitious fear.

He had never heard before of the presence of any fishermen or human inhabitants in this part of the world. However, this proved nothing, and only increased his curiosity to see them.

So he boldly approached the largest of the cabins, which was also the nearest at hand.

The door stood wide open, and the young inventor peered in.

The interior of the hut presented a strange spectacle.

In the wall at the further side was a huge fireplace. In this burned a few huge pieces of bituminous coal which was doubtless mined in the vicinity.

Over the fire hung a steaming iron pot on a swinging crane. Upon a small bench nearby, was a partly dressed guanoco. Some one had been preparing the meat for the kettle very recently.

But that individual had, for some reason or other, suddenly desisted in his work, and chose to absent himself. For what reason it was not altogether easy to guess.

This much Frank saw at first glance; then he took in other and more curious things.

Against the end wall of the hut there hung a ship's chronometer. Also an array of pea jackets and duck trousers, with other appurtenances of a sailor's garb. At the other end of the hut was an array of objects which caused Frank a curious chill.

Upon the wall there was spiked the head and shoulders of a siren woman, probably the figure head of a vessel. Some cutlasses and carbines were stacked under it.

But on a shelf nearby, there was a collection of grawsome objects. Six grinning skulls were there placed in line.

While over them was rudely chalked the inscription:

"By blood we live, by blood we spare none!"

"Ugh!" muttered the young inventor, "that may be a jest, but it is a dismal one."

And for the first time a possible inkling of the truth crossed his mind. But he was not the one to give way to fear, though he experienced a chill. He turned to the door.

"Be me sowl!" exclaimed Barney, "phwat do yez make av it, Misther Frank?"

"It is a mystery," declared the young inventor, "but I'm going to find some one of these people if such a thing is possible."

He passed out of the cabin and approached the next one. It was also empty.

Its appointments were not of the same character of the other cabin. But there were many articles which had once belonged aboard ship.

And this fact impressed Frank curiously. Certainly some vessel must have been dismantled to procure all of these articles. The doors of the huts even were one time cabin doors aboard some ship.

"Perhaps some vessel came ashore here and her crew formed a colony," reflected Frank.

From one hut to another he went. At last he gave a little start at a sight which now met his gaze.

Just where the cliff made its most abrupt angle, he saw an object far out on a point of rock. He rubbed his eyes and gazed at it.

It was a huge iron brazier, which would hold a great quantity of wood. He saw the narrow passage between great reefs beyond and the truth burst upon him.

"Heavens!" he ejaculated. "Is this a nest of wreckers and pirates? Is that beacon placed there to mislead mariners and decoy passing vessels ashore in time of storm?"

As the possibility of this terrible fact swept across Frank's mind, he was given a thrilling start, at an incident which transpired at that moment. From a point over their heads a rope noose came hurtling down and fell about Barney's powerful shoulders.

CHAPTER V.

IN CAPTIVITY.

So swift and unlooked for was this move that the Celt was pinioned almost before he had time to think.

He made one desperate effort to throw off the rope, but was hurled to the ground.

"Och, hone, Misther Frank!" he cried. "Wud yez cut it quick?"

Frank was always quick and ready witted.

He did not stop to see where the rope had come from or even to glance up. His instant impulse was to liberate his companion.

So he flashed out his knife and made a leap forward. A moment more and he would have cut the rope.

But some heavy object came with terrific force down upon his skull. He fell insensible with the last sound in his ears a harsh, jeering laugh.

Then down from niches and crevices in the cliff sprung numbers of the most lawless, roughest appearing men that ever graced the earth. Brawny fellows they were, reeking with rum and tobacco juice, the sheerest set of ruffians that a sea-faring life could produce.

Black-beard's gang of pirates were not to be compared with these fellows. Dirty, greasy and lustful rascals they were.

"Heigho, Ben Brant!" cried the largest and most powerful ruffian, pouncing upon Barney, "this is the best prize we hev lured into our net yet, mate."

"Ye're right, Joe Stimpson," was the growling reply. "Ha—ha! an Irishman, is he? Well, we'll make him dance on the gridiron in real Hibernian fashion. Is that one dead?" kicking Frank's prostrate form.

But the young inventor was already opening his eyes and recovering from his faint. His injuries were but temporary.

"Drag 'em in here, boys, quick!" commanded the ruffian called Ben Brant. "We've got to work shrewd to get our paws onto that airship. Once we kin capture that we've got the biggest game we ever tried for."

"Ye're right, Ben."

The human wolves dragged Frank and Barney into one of the huts.

As it chanced the entire scene was shut from Pomp's view by intervening huts.

Then a conference was held by the shore pirates—for such they were—as to the best plan for capturing the air ship. This was not an easyfeat.

But the fellow Brant seemed to be as wily and as full of schemes as a nut is of meat. He had soon hit upon a plan.

Barney and Frank were gagged as well as bound, so that their outcries could not be heard. Then several of the pirates made a long detour below the air ship's position.

The Sky Flyer was in such a position that it was easy for them to creep up under cover of the ledges to the very rail itself without being seen.

Now Pomp was in the pilot house, where he could command a view in all directions. But his gaze had for the most part followed Barney and Frank.

He saw them vanish beyond the line of huts at the cliff angle, and watched attentively for their reappearance. Time passed and they did not return.

"Golly!" muttered the coon. "Pears to me dey am making a berry long stay back dere. Wondah if anyfing am wrong?"

In his excitement he quite forgot the possibility of an attack from the rear. He kept his gaze constantly upon the cliff angle.

And all this while the pirates were creeping up in his rear. It was a lamentable oversight on Pomp's part, and perhaps not altogether excusable; but, however this was, the fact remained.

Nearer crept the shore pirates.

They could see Pomp plainly through the glass windows of the pilot house. But one thing deterred them from a bold rush.

They were not aware that Pomp was the only man on board. For aught they knew the cabin might hold a score of men.

In such an event a hard battle must ensue, and they were desirous of making the attack as complete a surprise as possible. For aught they knew other eyes than Pomp's were on the watch.

But unmolested they crept up to the air-ship's very rail. The next moment silently four of them leaped on deck.

The door of the main cabin was open. There was a long open space of deck extending to the pilot house where Pomp was stationed.

Had the darky turned his head a moment previous, he might yet have baffled them. Close beside him on the keyboard was a lever, a pressure of which would close and bar every outer door and window aboard the Sky Flyer.

But alas! Pomp did not dream of the deadly peril in his rear until too late. Some sound from the deck caused him to turn about.

The coon's blood turned icy cold at the spectacle which he beheld. He saw two giant forms glide into the cavern and coming over the rail, their fiendish visages contorted with triumph were two of the worst desperadoes he had ever set his gaze upon.

All in that one swift flash of time Pomp realized the truth. He knew instantly that the huts were a decoy and that Frank and Barney were in trouble.

His nerves were a tingle. His eyes rolled in terror, and for a moment he was powerless to act.

"Massy Lordy!" he huskily groaned, "dat am de awfulest fing I eber heerd ob. An' to fink I didn't hear dem."

Then he heard the rustle of the shore pirates coming through the cabin to attack him. It roused him.

Pomp acted upon impulse.

He reflected in that brief second that already four of the foe were aboard the air ship. To prevent more coming was the first move to make.

So he swung open the rotoscope lever. Up shot the air ship a thousand feet. Then Pomp swung the pilot-house door shut.

The door was of steel and not to be forced by ordinary means. The ruffians cursing fiercely flung themselves against it.

But they were unable to make even the slightest impression on it.

"Open, ye cursed nigger, or we'll skin ye alive!" roared the first one of the ruffians.

"Yo' kin bet I don't," retorted Pomp; "who am yo', an' wha' yo' want abo'd dis air ship?"

"We're limbs of Satan, and if you don't open the door an' surrender we'll take every bit of hide off ye by pieces!"

"Huh!" returned Pomp, coolly. "Does yo' spec I'se gwine to open de do' to sech folks as youse?"

"Will ye open?"

"No, sah!"

The four villains furiously belabored the door, cursing madly the while. Then they tried the windows. But the gratings were too heavy.

Pomp meanwhile had been doing some deep thinking. The air-ship was now a thousand feet from the earth and he held it there. He was in a quandary.

What should he do?

To go back to the earth seemed his duty, to rescue Barney and Frank if indeed they were alive. But how was he to give them help until he had got rid of the foe on board the air-ship?

"Massy Lordy!" groaned the terrified darky. "I jes' wish we hed kep' on our way an' let dem old cabins alone. If we hadn't stopped to look into dem we wouldn't hab got into sich a scrape. Wha' I'se gwine to do I dunno!"

Meanwhile the four shore pirates had discovered the fact that they were fully a thousand feet in the air. They looked up at the buzzing

rotoscopes and then down at the earth which seemed to them a frightful distance away.

Inexperienced aeronauts are sure to be at first tortured with the horrible fear of being dashed to pieces upon the earth below. The shore pirates caught this malady.

Their faces paled, and they strode uneasily about the deck. Finally one of them approached the pilot-house door again.

"Hello!" he called.

"Yes, sah," responded Pomp.

"How fur are we from ther earth?"

"About a fifth of a mile, sah."

"If we shed fall——"

"Yo' wud be killed, sah."

"Look here, nigger. We ain't noways bad. Let us down an' we'll give yew a big square in our bizness an' take yew inter our gang. We make heaps of money in our line, yew bet. Live on ther cream of ther land, an' don't pay nutthin' fer it nuther."

Pomp was disgusted.

"Wha' yo' take me fo'?" he snorted; "does yo' fink I'm a fool? De moment I open dis do' yo' cut mah froat."

"Never," returned the shore pirate, solemnly. "We give ye our word of honor."

"Wha' dat amount to?"

"Ain't yew goin' to let us down out of the sky? We want tew git back to earth. We'll let ye go scot-free if ye'll let us down."

Pomp was reflective. He saw that in a measure he had the pig by the ear. His native wit led him to make use of his advantage.

So he called out:

"I say youse?"

"Wall?"

"Who am yo', anyway, an' wha' yo' lib in sech a place fo'?"

"Wall, I'll tell ye?" replied the leader of the quartette. "We're what you might call gentlemen of fortune. Fust off we were mutineers on board the English brig Southdown. We tossed the cap'eu overboard in these very straits. Then we knew that we'd hang if we went back to England or any civilized part of the world."

"We made up a bargain to stay right yere and make a settlement of our own, an' a livin' in our own way. We beached the ship, took everything ashore and began lookin' fer snaps. Long came a fine Chilian barque one day. We got the crew ashore, knifed 'em an' give 'em to the sharks. Then we stripped ther ship and scuttled her in deep water. We put up a big beacon light and skippers standin' in to see what it is go onter ther reef out thar. Then we make it a point to confiscate her cargo by right of eminent domain or sich like. Our policy is, dead men tell no tales, but we're ready to take a likely chap like you into our band any time. Surrender, an' show us how tew run this ere air-ship an' we're yours truly."

Pomp listened to this horrible recital with cold blood and awful aversion. He did not disbelieve a word of it.

So this then was the nefarious occupation of the Magellan settlers? Cut-throats and pirates were they, afraid to return to civilization, but enjoying immunity from the law in this out-of-the-way corner of the world.

Pomp sturdily refused all such overtures. This enraged the pirates and they went below and rummaged the cabin.

In a few moments they came on deck again, and Pomp saw with horror that one of them carried a heavy sledge hammer. With this he could surely batter down the pilot house door.

CHAPTER VI.

POMP'S STRATEGY.

ONCE this was done Pomp knew that he would be at the mercy of the wretches. He could expect only short shrift.

It was to the darky's credit at that moment that he kept his head.

Generally speaking Pomp was brave as well as acute. A happy idea came to him in that moment.

He picked up a wire and attached to it a metal disc. A live wire connected with the dynamos was under the key board.

The coon switched off the current long enough to make the connection, and then carried the disc to the steel door. He placed the disc against the steel in such a way that a return current was formed.

Then he went back to the key board and turned on the full force of the dynamos. The steel door was charged so to speak "to the handle."

With evil exultation in his face the burly pirate advanced and swung the sledge hammer aloft.

With all his force he swung it against the door.

The result was thrilling.

The next moment he was turning terrific somersaults backward, entangled with the sledge. He landed against the cabin door a lifeless heap.

Astounded the other shore pirates saw this inexplicable move. They were wholly at a loss to understand what had struck their companion.

Unfamiliar with the uses of electricity, it never occurred to them that it was the blow of the sledge against the door that had given their companion his quietus.

He had certainly been shot or given a blow in some manner. They rushed forward and bent down over him.

Pomp chuckled with keen delight.

"I jes' hopesa nodder one ob dem tries dat," he muttered. "I reckon he done fink he am playin' wif de debbil."

The three shore pirates were astounded to find that their companion was dead. His neck was broken.

Words can hardly express the sensations experienced by them. For a moment they were stupefied. Then quite naturally came intense anger and a thirst for vengeance.

They growled a few moments over the corpse of their companion; then one of them sprang up furiously.

He seized the sledge hammer.

The three pirates now advanced. Their furious intention was to break into the pilot house and kill Pomp. No more amicable overtures were to be made.

Pomp only grinned.

He watched them coming with a thrill of actual delight.

"All de fools ain' dead," he muttered. "I jes' reckon dere won't be but two ob dem fellers in about a minnit an' a harf."

With a savage curse, the burly pirate raised the sledge. He took plenty of time, and brought it down with furious force.

It struck the steel door, but recoiled like a cannon ball, and sweeping the villain backward, came within an ace of braining him.

But the electric current had passed through his body with sickening force, and he shot with frightful rapidity against the deck rail.

There was a bending and swaying of this, and though it did not break, the villain tilted clean over it and the next moment shot downward to the earth.

What was left of him after that frightful fall was never known. But it was certain that he was dead long before he reached the earth.

Aghast and puzzled, the two remaining pirates stood for a moment by the cabin door. Then they went to the rail and looked over.

Nothing was to be seen of their comrade. Certainly he had gone down to an awful fate.

And they were utterly unable to comprehend it all. What had struck him? What strange power had hurled him over the rail to his death?

They might have yielded to a superstitious fear, but at this moment, looking up, they saw the pilot house door wide open and Pomp grinning at them with a revolver in each hand.

"Hands up, gemmen!" he said blandly; "if yo' don't I shall kill yo' fo' dead, suah!"

Like cowed reptiles they obeyed. They held their hands up and Pomp marched them aft to a small cabin into which he securely locked them. Then he went back to the pilot-house.

Thus far he had the best of the situation. He was master of the air ship and had outwitted the foe.

But his one thought now was of Barney and Frank. How could he render them succor if, as he hoped, they were not dead?

He allowed the air ship to descend until within four hundred feet of the earth. Then he tumbled the body of the dead pirate over the rail.

He saw that a great crowd were gathered on the cliff, and as the body went hurtling down a mad yell went up, and bullets went rattling against the hull of the air ship.

This angered Pomp.

"Golly! I jes' pay dem back fo' dat," he muttered, as he picked up his Winchester.

He went to the pilot-house, and getting the range opened fire on the freebooters. He had a dead cinch upon them, and drove them from the cliff like sheep.

The shore hawks disappeared into a cavern in the face of the cliff, and here they were safe. And it was at this moment that Pomp beheld a welcome sight.

"Glory fo' goodness," he cried, "dat am de bes' ob luck."

He saw a couple of familiar forms running along in the cover of a jungle just over the cliff. They were making frantic signs to him.

Barney and Frank had been bound and gagged and thrown into one of the huts as we have seen. The door was closed and they were left alone.

There was no doubt but that Brant, the leader of the shore pirates, believed them safe enough, and in the excitement of capturing the air ship no further thought was given them.

But lying there in the dark hut neither of the prisoners was idle. Both writhed in their bonds.

Finally Barney wriggled near enough to Frank to get his fingers up to his mouth and remove the gag. Then Frank did the same for him.

"They have placed no guard at the door so far as I can see," declared Frank. "Oh, if I could only gain the use of my hands."

"Begorra, we moight give thim the slip if we cud only git these ropes off, sor!" said Barney, eagerly.

"I believe you."

Frank partly loosened the cords at his wrist. But still they seemed to hold firm. But now an idea came all at once to Barney.

"Whisht now, an' I'll do it for yez, Misther Frank!" cried the Celt; "jist roll over here an' I'll be afther cutting yure ropes with me teeth."

"With your teeth?"

"Shure, sor, they'll be no tougher than some av the meat I've eaten in me day."

"If you only could——"

"I kin that, sor, av they'll only give us the toime."

The next moment Barney with his powerful teeth was at work on Frank's bonds. As he worked Frank could not help but wonder what Pomp was doing.

"Be shure, sor, the naygur will never be caught napping," declared Barney. "I'll bet me loife on him!"

"Well, I'm inclined to believe you're right, Barney," agreed Frank. "Ah, that is easier—God be praised, I am free!"

The last strand had parted, and, true enough Frank was able to use his hands. What followed can be briefly told.

It was easy for him to undo the other knots. In less than five minutes at this work of untying, both men stood on their feet free.

There was a crevice in the door, and Frank applied his eye to it. He saw a knot of the pirates standing near.

They were much excited about something, and he surmised that something was the air ship.

It was certain that it was impossible to escape by the front of the hut. The back of it stood against the cliff.

Barney, however, took a strong oak slab, and began to pry at one of the rear boards. It yielded and presently gave way entirely.

An aperture was made large enough for them to crawl through. They did so, and stood in a narrow space between the hut and the cliff.

"Whurroo!" whispered Barney; "we'll give them the slip yet, Misster Frank. Av yez kin boost me up I think I kin git over the edge of the cliff, and thin I'll help yez up too."

"But they will see us!" exclaimed the young inventor.

"If they do, thin we must run for it."

"You are right!"

Frank placed his shoulder under the Celt, and Barney went easily over the face of the cliff. He was now in plain view of the pirates, who were not twenty yards away.

But every one of them was gazing in an opposite direction at the air-ship. Not one thought of looking behind him.

Barney knotted one leg about a tree trunk, and reaching down, helped Frank up also. Both fugitives paused a moment on the brow of the cliff to recover their wind.

Then they slid noiselessly away over the eminence, and were out of sight and sound of their foes. So delighted were they that they fairly embraced each other.

"Begorra, we desaved them foine that toime!" cried Barney.

"That we did," agreed Frank; "and Pomp did the same."

He pointed up to the air-ship, which was high in the sky. As he did so both saw a human body swing over the rail and fall to the earth. Then the air-ship a few moments later began to sink.

They watched it with anxious gaze and saw that it was nearing them. A joyful cry escaped Frank.

"I see Pomp!" he cried; "it was not his body then which went over the rail! Come, Barney, we must let him see us."

And with this both ran along in the verge of the jungle, trying their best to attract Pomp's attention.

And that they were bound to meet with success was evidenced a few moments later, when the air-ship was seen to suddenly change its course and bear down toward them. It was certain that Pomp had seen them.

CHAPTER VII.

A CLEW.

WHEN Pomp saw Barney and Frank he hastened to throw over the rail a rope-ladder of strongest silk. It went down to the length of a hundred feet.

The coon saw a number of the pirates come storming out of the prison hut and knew that the escape had been discovered. But nothing was to be feared now.

Down swept the rope-ladder.

Barney grabbed it as it passed near him, and then Frank followed suit. Up the ladder they went.

Some of the pirates came over the cliff and opened fire. But Pomp sent the air ship up out of range.

A few moments later the rescued men came over the rail.

"Golly!" cried Pomp, wildly, "I neber was mch glad in mah life. I done feared it was all up wif you ones."

"It was a close call!" cried Frank. "I would not take such chances again."

"Bejabers they war a bad lot av min," declared Barney; "bad cess to them! But they'll never thrubble us more, fer shure we've given them a bad leave intoirely."

"True, but they are not done with us yet," declared Frank, rigidly. "Such a pack of murdering scoundrels must never be left to menace the safety of honest men."

"Shure thin, we'll be after givin' them a batin'?" asked Barney.

"I mean to break up the nest of vipers, aye, exterminate them if need be," declared Frank.

"Golly! I hab got two ob dem fo' yo' right abo'd dis ship, Marse Frank," declared Pomp.

"What do you mean, Pomp?" asked Frank, sharply.

"I show yo', sah, if yo' cum wif me."

The coon led the way aft and opened the door of the small cabin where the two pirates were cowering. They instantly began to beg piteously for their lives. Frank regarded them contemptuously.

"You pair of vipers!" he exclaimed, with righteous wrath. "I would subserve justice by hanging you! Now I want a confession from you of your crimes!"

Of course, they acceded to this demand, and gave a detailed and authentic account of the history of their gang.

They declared that Brant held the money, and that he made periodical trips to Rio de Janiero, to place it safely in the bank. Some rich hauls had been made, and the gang had prospered.

Frank caused the air ship to descend until within easy descending distance of the earth. Then he threw out the rope ladder.

"Now, you dogs," he declared, "I want you to make yourselves scarce. I would advise you not to return to your settlement, for I mean to destroy it root and branch."

Trembling with terror and promising better things, the villains made their descent. They hastily plunged into the jungle and were lost to view.

"Phwere will they be after going, Misster Frank?" asked Barney.

"I don't know nor care," replied the young inventor, "but they will do well to keep away from that den under the cliff."

Frank now directed the air-ship's course until it hung over the pirates' den. They had all sought refuge in the deep cavern.

Frank smiled and said:

"They think themselves safe, but I'll show them!"

He went into the cabin and came out with a number of dynamite bombs. He began dropping these among the huts.

The effect was thrilling. The explosions were terrific and the cabins were soon naught but a heap of burning ruins. Then the boats in the bay were destroyed.

But the avenger was not done yet. Frank held the air-ship over the mouth of the cavern.

Then he dropped dynamite upon the overhanging cliff, until tons upon tons of rock collapsed and blocked the mouth of the cave.

"We'll see!" he said, grimly, "whether they will be safe in that retreat or not. It will be a long day ere they emerge."

This done, he changed the course of the air-ship. In a short while she was speeding southward and the scene of the late thrilling incidents was left behind forever.

What was the fate of the pirates none ever knew. Whether they succeeded in digging their way out or not it was never known.

But it was safe to say that their lawless career ended then and there, and that one of the worst gangs of cut-throats in the world was destroyed.

Our adventurers had ample reason to congratulate themselves upon a close and lucky escape. But new scenes and incidents now opened up to them and the Straits of Magellan and its pirate crew were speedily forgotten.

With rapid pace now the air-ship made the Antarctic Seas.

South of Cape Horn the atmosphere underwent a great change, the temperature becoming frightfully cold.

The skies grew gray and cheerless and the mighty restless sea was tumultuous and stormy. Few vessels were seen.

It was plain that every hour now was bringing them to a part of the world unfrequented by man. The sense of desolation was so acute as to almost breed homesickness.

Soon an iceberg was sighted. A few hours later these became common enough, and gradually thickened until finally the great ice fields came into view.

The voyagers now were obliged to don furs, and the cabins were kept warmly heated by electricity. Altogether they were quite comfortable.

And still the air-ship kept on its southward course, until one morning Frank declared:

"I can sight Graham Land. We shall soon be over the Antarctic Continent—the unknown region."

Of course all were intensely interested. Both Barney and Pomp were well aware of the theory of scientists that a warm region, fertile and perhaps inhabited, existed about the South Pole.

Whether this was the truth or not, they would soon have the satisfaction of knowing. So they looked forward eagerly to events ahead.

The air-ship kept on its way rapidly now. The frightful cold of the ice-fields seemed to moderate as they approached the land.

Soon the great cliffs and sparsely wooded heights were beneath the air ship. There were mighty fiords and giant crevasses. Everywhere mighty winter was king.

"It is easy to see!" declared Frank, "why it is impossible for a ship's crew to land here. There is really no chance for a man to gain these snowy heights alive."

Beyond the high coast line, however, there was spread to view a great region of glaciers and ice-peaks. It seemed an almost impenetrable world in itself.

For several days the air-ship slowly sailed over this territory. The voyagers were kept busy with their glasses looking for a possible trace of the lost navigators.

"For it is not at all improbable," said Frank, "that Jansen's balloon may have descended into this very part of the Polar region. Heaven pity the aeronauts if it has!"

"Bejabers they'd niver git out av this aloive," declared Barney.

"They would surely perish," agreed Frank.

But the morning of the fourth day Frank made a thrilling discovery. Far to the southward he distinguished a peculiar cloud against the sombre sky. At times this cloud was lit up as with lightning flashes.

"A volcano!" he finally concluded. "It can be nothing else."

"Be me sowl, if that's phwat it is," cried Barney, "mebbe it's a bit warmer about it."

"We shall see," declared Frank.

He set the course of the air ship for the distant volcano. As it drew nearer, the ice began to give way to uplands of deep snow and forests of fir.

It was plain that the voyagers were drawing nearer to a warm region. This was of interest.

And a confirming sight soon burst upon their view. A great plain

half green with Arctic masses was seen, and in this grazed a number of reindeer. They fled at sight of the air ship.

Thus far no clew of the aeronauts had been found; but now, as the air-ship was gliding along over a group of tall firs, Barney gave an exclamation.

"Shure, Misther Frank, an' phwat is that?" he cried.

He pointed to an object deep among the tree's branches. It was of a bright red color, and looked like a strip of silken cloth caught in the foliage.

Frank stopped the air-ship; then he threw over the rope ladder.

"Go down and get it, Barney," he said.

The Celt obeyed.

Down the ladder he scrambled and secured the object. He brought it quickly on board.

It was really a fold of silken material, and as Frank held it up, he saw that a little tin waterproof box was fastened to it. He instantly recognized its character and gave a great cry.

"By Jove!" he shouted; "we have a clew!"

"Phwat's that?" cried Barney.

"Why, it is nothing more nor less than one of those high pressure balloons set free as a signal of distress by the lost navigators. It must have collapsed for some reason and fallen into that tree."

"Golly! dat am jes a fac', Marse Frank!" cried Pomp, with wide open eyes.

"That luks loike a letter mebbe," suggested Barney, as he indicated the tin box.

"And very likely it is!" declared Frank, "let us read it."

He removed the tin box from its fastenings to the silk. Then he pried it open.

Sure enough, within it was quite a sizable roll of very thin paper. On it was written in hardly legible hand the following:

"Give us help, for the love of Heaven. We have reached the South Pole only to fall into the hands of savage natives. We are close prisoners, and only pray that our lives may be spared.

"Julius Jansen,
"Pierre Vadeau,
"Justus Von Meyer,
"Theodore Bunce."

Signed.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE BALLOON.

FOR a moment after reading this astounding appeal Frank Reade, Jr., was too excited to act.

"Eureka!" he exclaimed. "Let us pray that we are not behind time."

Then he went into the cabin. He was trembling like a leaf.

He took down a bottle of good Madiera to steady his nerves. Then he read the message again.

"It does not give the exact location," he muttered, "except to say that it is the South Pole. Is it exactly at the Pole? Never mind, we must find that out for ourselves!"

He went on deck in a somewhat firmer frame of mind. The air-ship was now sent forward with renewed speed.

The semi-gloom of the Antarctic day hung over everything, and objects at a great distance were not altogether clear.

But Frank believed that beyond the volcano he must find the region of the South Pole.

So the lost navigators had fallen into the hands of savage natives? That settled the fact that the Antarctic as well as the Arctic was inhabited by man.

There were the Esquimaux in the North, but what sort of people were these in the Antarctic? Frank was somewhat curious to know.

On sailed the air-ship until the slopes of the volcano were near at hand.

They were harsh in outline and rocky, with fearful defiles and great jugged crags and peaks.

The crater was many acres in extent and made a miniature lake of lava and fire which kept spouting upward in a desultory way.

Frank estimated the volcano to be fully ten thousand feet in altitude. It was a giant mountain.

But far to the southeast there extended a range fully as rocky and nearly as high. Beyond this nothing of snow or ice could be seen.

There were rolling lands, rough foothills and ragged, desolate slopes.

"Jupiter!" exclaimed Frank in surprise. "I don't see how human beings could live in this region. It seems hardly able to support life."

"Yet there is game, sor. Wud yez luk at that?" cried Barney, as he indicated a black fox cantering over a foot hill.

Also flocks of ducks hung thickly over a sedgy pond in the mountain side. As Barney had declared, there was plenty of game.

But another discovery was close at hand.

As they were sailing over one of the peaks Frank spied an object in a small crevice of the ledges which gave him a start.

"Hold on, Barney!" he cried. "Lower the air-ship!"

"Lower it, sor?"

"Yes!"

Barney instantly obeyed, and down settled the Sky Flyer. As it touched the ledge Frank leaped over the rail.

He was not a moment in reaching the crevice. The object he beheld there convinced him that his eyesight had not deceived him.

For there he beheld a heap of tangled cords and torn silk. Also an overturned car and divers articles which had been in it.

"The balloon!" he exclaimed.

It was, indeed, Jansen's balloon, or rather what was left of it. In a moment he and Barney were straightening it out.

But the oiled silk bag was rent and gashed in many places. It had been constructed with two inner bags, and each of these were perforated.

Rolling the silk up in a great bundle, Barney and Frank carried it to the air ship's deck.

Then they returned to the car and began further research.

The car of the Republic was an ingeniously constructed affair.

It was square in shape, made of light lacquer wood, and so heavily padded as to be quite comfortable and impervious to the cold.

There were long seats, which could be utilized as berths on the four sides of the car. The articles of furniture were small, exceedingly light, and only such as would be needed upon such a voyage.

There was a case of astronomical instruments, charts, papers and books. Also a chemical and geological outfit. To descend to common matters there then remained cooking utensils and articles of food and clothing which might come under the head of supplies.

All were stowed away aboard the car with compactness and wonderful ingenuity.

Frank marveled at this, but he kept an inventory and everything was removed to the air-ship.

Among the effects he was delighted to find the log or day book of the lost navigators. This he took back with him to the cabin to read. Frank was at once satisfied of one thing.

The savage natives had not captured the balloon at the time of making prisoners of the aeronauts. If they had there would naturally be little left of it now.

In that case he could only assume that the balloon had got away from the aeronauts or perhaps from the savage captors themselves and had been carried on to this out-of-the-way point.

It might be some distance from this spot that the capture had occurred. To enlighten his mind on this point he referred to the log.

He passed over much illogical matter which alluded to the voyage from Rio to Enderby Land. Here the balloon started upon its voyage.

Upon the fifth day Frank found the following record:

"Morning bright and cold. Thermometer registers 60 degrees below, barometer indicates no storm. We are now in sight of mountains, one of which is a volcano.

"At the rate we are sailing now ought to pass over these mountains by noon. That should bring us to the region of the Antarctic Pole. What land of promise lies before us we can only imagine.

"High noon. We have just passed the volcano. It indulged in a wonderful eruption to welcome us.

"Three P. M. We have sailed for hours over the most desolate and barren of regions. But now our glass shows us a distant green plain or valley. Vadeau, whose eyesight is best, declares that he can see habitations.

"Four P. M. We are now over the wonderful land of the Pole. And it is as warm as summer between these mighty hills. What a wonderful discovery is ours? We can sight habitations, of stone and wood, and have seen a dark-skinned people who have congregated below us and seem much excited.

"Bunce is anxious to go down and interview them. Vadeau thinks they may be hostile. We have taken a two-thirds vote and it is decided that we risk a visit to them. May some good come of it. But I have strange misgivings."

Here the journal ended. But Frank could easily imagine the rest.

He saw the balloon descend among the natives. He saw the lost navigators instantly beset and made prisoners. The balloon in some manner must have broken away.

All was clear enough, and the fate of the lost navigators seemed solved. But just at this moment Pomp rushed into the cabin.

"Golly, Marse Frank!" he cried. "Come on deck quick, sah!"

"What is the matter?" asked Frank, in surprise, springing up.

"Come along, sah, an' I done show yo'!"

Frank followed the excited coon. Barney had preceded them. Then Pomp pointed to a high spur of the mountain wall.

"Wha' yo' call dat, sah? Amn't it one ob dem lost men, sah?"

Frank gave a gasping cry.

"By Jove!" he ejaculated, "it is a white man."

The distant man was making frantic gestures, and evidently seemed to have recognized them as countrymen of his.

Then down from the peak he climbed and came running toward the air-ship. It took him a long while to cover the distance.

But finally he came up to the air-ship's rail. He was a tall, spare-built but wiry man with hawk like nose and a goatee.

Even before he spoke, Frank knew that he was a Frenchman.

"Mon Dieu, monsieurs, zis is ze happiest moment of my life. You coom just in ze nick of time to save us all. Are you no Americans?"

"We are," replied Frank. "Are you one of the lost navigators?"

"Pierre Vadeau, at your service, m'sieur. Whom have I ze honaire of addressing?"

Frank introduced himself and very quickly explanations followed.

The Frenchman's story cleared up the mystery.

It seemed that he had been in the car of the balloon when his companions were seized. Before he could leap out to their aid, one of the natives had cut the drag rope and the balloon shot skyward.

But just as it left the earth, one of the Antarctic natives sent a javelin through and through the silken bag.

Of course the balloon began to collapse. But a powerful breeze carried it about twenty miles and allowed it to fall into this lonely place, where the natives had failed to find it.

And Vadeau, armed with his pistols, had been trying to find his way back to the relief of his friends when he suddenly chanced to spy the air-ship.

"Zen my heart it leaped into my mouth," he declared zealously. "I know zat some one come for to save us. We have been long time in zis country. Get lost an' no find way to get home. Ah, mon Dieu! zis is ver' mooth happy moment!"

"Well," said Frank brusquely, "if you think you can direct us aright we will go at once and try to rescue your companions."

"Oh, zat I can do, m'sieur. Jes' give me one chance—one ver' leetle chance. So, zat way first, den I tell you mooth more."

Vadeau pointed to the southward. Frank nodded, and, turning, spoke a few words of command to Barney.

In a few moments the air-ship was aloft and gliding swiftly away to cover the alleged twenty miles.

CHAPTER IX.

THE POLAR PEOPLE.

Now the real Antarctic land began to reveal itself. Green slopes were succeeded by little meadows and purling streams, rich intervals and placid rivers.

Everywhere the larch and the fir gave way to the ash and the oak, with a sprinkling of pine. It looked easy enough to derive a living from the richly fertile region.

As Vadeau declared, the Antarctic natives were agricultural in their pursuits.

"Then they should be friendly!" declared Frank. "No agricultural people are aggressive or war-like. I think we can treat with them!"

Vadeau shrugged his shoulders.

"Mebbe so, M'sieur! You are ze right man. I have no doubt you may be able, sir, ver' mooth so, sir!"

Swiftly now the panorama unfolded. Suddenly a growth of trees divided and showed a collection of stone and wood huts by the shores of a small lake.

These habitations were of the lean-to style of architecture, primitive, yet firm in lines of construction. Hundreds of the Arctic natives were seen.

The settlement was almost large enough to merit the title of city. As the air-ship swooped down there was seen to be much excitement in the place.

The Antarctic natives were now to be seen at closer quarters. They were well formed and dressed in suits of skin from which the fur was removed.

The women and children huddled into the huts, but the men, evidently despising fear, were all in the open and armed with spears and slings.

"They are real barbarians," declared Frank, "they know nothing of modern advantages!"

"Ver' true, m'sieur!" declared Vadeau, "but zey are very strong and ver' brave. I would not care to put myself in zere hands!"

Frank saw that the Frenchman was right. Despite their agricultural proclivities, these people were men of strong notions and warriors to the core.

It was evident that they resented encroachment upon their domain, and their very attitude bristled with sheer hostility.

Frank studied the situation for some moments; then he ran his eye critically over the huts.

"Where do you suppose your friends are confined, if indeed they are held prisoners?" asked Frank of the Frenchman.

Vadeau put up his hands deprecatingly.

"Ah, m'sieur, zat is a ver' hard question," he replied. "I should say dat zere am ver' leetle chance zat dey are held prisoners."

"What?" exclaimed Frank. "You don't think they were slaughtered?"

"Ah, m'sieur, I not know zat. Only my idea—zat is all."

"Oh!" exclaimed Frank. "Well, we'll try and find out about it."

He allowed the air-ship to go down until within speaking distance of the natives. They were drawn up in a sullen throng, perhaps a thousand in number.

Frank spoke to them in several tongues, but of course they did not understand; then he began with sign talk.

They motioned for him to come down to the earth. But Frank was too shrewd for this, even if he had not had the balloon incident as a precedent to guide him.

This was slow progress and Frank grew impatient.

"Confound their thick heads!" he cried; "how am I to find out anything about the prisoners? I've a mind to throw a shell down among them and scatter them, and then go through their houses!"

"Zat is right," cried Vadeau, eagerly. "Zey are but dogs. It be no harm to kill a few of dem. Zey are heathens!"

"That is true!" agreed Frank; "but they are human beings, and I have no right to take their lives needlessly!"

The Frenchman put up both his hands.

"Ah, vat you do den!" he cried, deprecatingly. "My friends zey may be killed yet."

"We will rescue them if they are yet alive!" declared Frank, grimly.

He walked aft and began to study the huts closely. If the three

scientists were yet alive they were doubtless prisoners in some one of these.

But which one was it? If he only knew, for a fact, it would be a very easy matter to effect their liberation, but there seemed no clew to guide him.

"By jove," he muttered, "I'm badly stuck. What shall I do? If there was only some way I could make those barbarians understand me!"

But at that moment a complete change in the situation came.

In a twinkling the tables were turned, and the voyagers were again treated to surprise.

Suddenly the demeanor of the Arctic natives changed. They became wildly excited, and began to rush madly hither and thither.

"What's the matter with them?" cried Frank, in surprise; "they seem to be clean crazy!"

"And so zey air, m'sieur" declared Vadeau. "Zere is ver' good raison for dat."

"Eh; what is it?"

"M'sieur should look to the mountain yonder. What does he see?"

Frank looked in the direction indicated, and gave a thrilled start. In a flash he saw all.

Over the mountain wall there had suddenly poured into the valley a literal army of wild men. They were the fiercest lot of barbarians Frank thought he had ever seen.

That they were not part of this band of natives was very plain. That they were foes became also a fact. The valley natives showed intense fear.

Their drums began to beat discordantly, and their warriors uttered a moaning war-cry. They crouched with their primitive weapons ready to defend their homes.

Frank was instantly interested. He saw that the mountain men had come to attack those of the valley.

The air-ship did not seem to have an overawing effect upon the invaders.

They paused but a brief while to regard it with apparent wonderment. Then they came on again to the attack.

"Golly!" cried Pomp, "dey am so berry much stronger dey will jes' eat dese peoples up!"

"Bejabers, if they do they will be afther atin' up the gentlemin we are lookin' fer!" declared Barney.

"Barney, you're right," cried Frank. "We must not allow them to enter the village, and that makes me think. If we could only talk with these black-heads, perhaps we could compromise with them by effecting the release of the prisoners as an offset to defending them from the mountain men."

"Ah, m'sieur, you are ze right zare," cried Vadeau. "You now try them, they may be easier to talk wif."

"We will do it," agreed Frank.

So he lowered the air-ship a trifle and again shouted to the leaders of the valley natives. This time it had a stronger effect.

They came nearer to the air-ship and were prone to eagerly interpret Frank's gestures. In a few moments the compromise was effected.

It was understood that the three prisoners were to be set free if the air ship would lend its succor to the natives. It was known then for the first time that they were really alive.

The spirits of all were now high. The valley people seemed to take courage and began to mass their numbers to give the mountain men battle.

But Frank was bound to guard against treachery, so he insisted that they first liberate the three scientists. Accordingly the leader of the valley natives advanced to the door of one of the huts and opened it.

In a few moments there emerged from this hut the remaining three lost navigators. They looked pale and thin but were otherwise all right.

They regarded the air-ship with simple amazement. Frank threw a rope ladder over the rail and descended upon it.

He gripped the rescued men by the hand and answered their surprised questions as quickly as possible. They were much surprised at the news that the Sky Flyer had really come into the Antarctic for their rescue.

"On my word," cried Dr. Jansen, "I had never heard of you or your wonderful air-ship; Mr. Reade, or I should never have attempted to cross the Antarctic in a balloon. So you have come to our relief? Well, I can say that you were just in time, for these people I am sure had decided to kill us as invaders and tos."

"Then it is very fortunate that we have come at this time," replied Frank, with gratification. "I am indeed glad I have found you all alive and well. We feared the worst."

"In one sense our Arctic voyage of exploration has been a failure," declared the doctor. "To be sure we succeeded in reaching the South Pole, but if it was not for you and your air-ship we would never have been able to retrace our steps."

"I fear that is too true!"

"You have heard our story, I presume, from Vadeau?"

"Yes," replied Frank, "and I have the remains of your balloon on board the air-ship."

The doctor was somewhat surprised at this announcement. But now the fat, good-natured Herr Von Meyer, the German mineralogist, pressed forward.

"Mein Gott un' Himmel!" he cried, profusely, "you vos our savior, Meester Reade. Gott pless you! We would shust haf been killed eef you had not come to save us!"

Frank bowed and shook hands warmly with the good-natured

German, and then exchanged warm greetings with the remaining scientist, Mr. Theodore Bunce.

"It is characteristic of America to furnish the man to solve the problem of aerial navigation," said the geographer. "If I had looked at the matter soberly I would have seen how utterly crazy was our idea of crossing the Antarctic in a balloon."

"It was an undertaking certainly attended with risk," replied Frank.

"The truth was, we were all so eager to solve the mystery of the South Pole that we really were about willing to sacrifice ourselves, if need be, to do that."

"I can understand it," agreed Frank. "It was a powerful motive. But I trust that I shall be able yet to return you all safely to your friends."

"Mon Dieu! Nothing ees impossible for M'sieur Reade!" declared Vadeau, with a polite scrape.

All now went quickly aboard the air-ship. The scientists were wildly enthusiastic over the great invention, and could hardly believe their good fortune.

But there were thrilling incidents close at hand to claim the attention of all just now.

CHAPTER X.

CONTINUING THE EXPLORATION.

The mountain men had meanwhile come rapidly down to the attack. Already they had met the advance guard of the valley natives.

Frank sent the air-ship aloft.

He took in the situation at a glance.

"I can soon stop that!" he muttered, "it will be easy!"

He went into the cabin and brought out some electric bombs. He held the air-ship directly over the mountain men.

Then he dropped one of the bombs. It struck the earth just in front of their leaders.

There was a roar like a cannon and an earthquake shock. A hole large enough to bury a house was blown out of the ground.

The advancing mountain men were hurled back as if with a giant hand. The great pit had instantly yawned at their feet and a number of them were covered with the sand and flying debris.

The scientists had viewed this with amazement.

"Ye gods!" exclaimed Bunce. "A handful of men with dynamite could conquer the world with this air ship."

"Mein Gott!" ejaculated Von Meyer. "Unzer Fritz would gif half his empire fer this air ship!"

"Be jabers, av it was moine," cried Barney, "I'd mighty soon bring England to her sineses an' set ould Oireland free!"

Everybody laughed at this. Then attention was once more claimed by the scene below.

This was now growing exciting. The valley natives, encouraged by the powerful assistance given them, began to pitch into the mountain men.

The latter were utterly demoralized, and able to make little resistance. They broke into a confused rout, and for a time it seemed as if they would be exterminated.

Frank had no desire to indulge in human slaughter, so he dropped no more bombs. He had accomplished all that was necessary, and that was the defeat of the mountain men.

And their defeat was effectual. They were driven into the wild fastnesses of the hills, where they made good their escape.

The valley natives returned, jubilant with their victory. From that moment they were friends with the white men from the north.

The air ship descended into the village, and a conference was held with the Antarctic people.

Dr. Jansen quickly established a sign language with them. From them he learned that not many miles to the westward, there were the shores of an open sea.

At once the ardor of the scientist was fired. His eyes sparkled, and he made copious notes on the subject.

After some hours spent in the village, Frank addressed Bunce:

"What are your wishes? Shall we leave this region very soon?"

"Really I—that is—I suppose you are anxious to return at once?"

"It is quite a long voyage home," declared Frank.

"You are right. I will talk with the others."

And he proceeded to do so. But, to the surprise of all, Dr. Jansen said:

"Gentlemen, I can understand your desire to return home at once. But I have a mighty desire to remain here and finish the exploration of this place. These people are now friendly, and I shall have no trouble. I beg of you to go and leave me here. I will find my way home as best I can."

The astonishment of the others was great.

"Is the man mad?" gasped Bunce.

"Ach, Himmel! He would nefare get home from here without the air-ship!" declared Von Meyer.

But argument was of no avail. Jansen was very resolute.

"I am a devotee of science," he said. "I am willing to immolate my life upon this altar of research and discovery. If I die in this region I will leave behind me a faithful record of all its attributes and characteristics, which some future visitor here may find of benefit."

"That is nonsense!" cried Bunce, "that would be nothing gained. Better return and perfect another air-ship to come here with again."

"Now that we are here, why not consummate our purpose?" argued the famous scientist. "We may never be able to get here again."

"But of what benefit will it be to the world at large for you to remain here?"

"It will gratify my own curiosity and purpose. That is something."

The others were in despair. A consultation was held. It did not seem right to sail away and leave Jansen behind.

Yet what was to be done?

"I tell you we must deal with him as a crazy man!" declared Bunce. "What will his wife and child do? It is absurd to leave him here. If he will not go amicably, we must take him by force. The infatuation of this discovery has turned his head. He will come to his senses later on!"

In fact this seemed the most sensible view of the situation, and it had almost been decided to adopt it. But Frank Reade, Jr., objected.

"No!" he said, resolutely, "that is not right. It would not be fair play. The man is in his right mind and is entitled to proper consideration."

Then he called the doctor into the cabin privately.

"You are anxious to complete your exploration of this region?" he asked.

"Yes," replied the great scientist, "I am willing to break every sacred tie which connects me with the civilized world to do it."

Frank saw that Jansen was in earnest. He respected the great scientist's sincerity.

"Will you be satisfied with a hasty exploration?" he asked, "or rather how great a length of time do you desire to tarry in this region?"

"I simply wish to establish the boundaries of the Antarctic region," replied Jansen; "satisfy myself as to its phenomena and its principal features. That is all."

"That is all right," replied Frank. "I confess to a weakness in that direction myself."

Jansen's blood quickened.

"What?" he exclaimed. "Then you are not anxious to return at once? You will even—"

"Wait for your exploration," interrupted Frank, with a smile.

"Yes, if you will agree to make it as short as possible."

Jansen was too full of emotion for adequate utterance.

"You may be sure of that," he said, fulsomely. "I gladly agree, Frank."

They shook hands and went on deck. When the decision was announced it was received joyfully.

"I am very glad to hear that," replied Bunce. "It settles a distressing possibility. Now let us go forward with the exploration."

Jansen announced at first his desire to visit the open sea of which the valley people had told him.

This was distant not over one hundred miles. The air-ship could sail thither in six or eight hours, and preparations were at once made for the start.

Soon all were aboard. The equipments of the scientists had at their first capture been confiscated by the natives. To attempt to recover these now would have been difficult; so the attempt was not made.

However, all of their valuable effects and instruments had been recovered from the car of the balloon, and Vadeau had them in charge. So the party was not so badly off after all.

Leave was taken of the valley people, who were profuse in their friendly overtures, being grateful for the assistance rendered them by the air-ship.

Soon the Sky Flyer was sailing away to the westward in search of the open sea.

The valley now gave way to a mighty plateau, and this was carpeted with a green which was beautiful to behold, deep set among the rocky hills.

That the region was volcanic was easily seen. But sailing over a high divide the party came upon a thrilling scene.

The open sea lay before them. It was no myth, and the valley natives had told the truth.

For some moments deeply impressed the voyagers gazed upon the mighty expanse of water.

It extended to the westward as far as the eye could reach. It was smooth and placid as glass.

Sandy beaches hemmed it in, and great cliffs frowned down upon it. In no other part of the world could there be found such scenery.

"Egad!" exclaimed Bunce, "if I did not know better I should think that I was upon another planet."

"Ach, Himmel! You are right, Herr Bunce," cried Von Meyer.

"It is very wonderful—very strange!"

"Mon Dieu! there is no such country as this anywhere else upon the whole earth," declared Vadeau.

But Jansen gazed upon the scene with a deep light burning in his eyes.

"You are right, gentlemen," he said; "this is the only hot sea that I know of on the face of the earth."

"Eh, bien," exclaimed Vadeau. "What is zat, m'sieur Jansen? You call it a hot sea?"

"I do," replied Jansen.

All eyes were turned upon him in amazement.

"How you know dot all de time?" asked Von Meyer.

Even Frank was surprised and gazed sharply at the waters below.

He gave a violent start.

He could see a thin fringe of steam where the water washed upon the sands. The sea water was certainly hot.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed; "that is true!"

"Of course it is," affirmed Jansen; "does this not pay us well for our trouble in coming here? This is the only hot sea in the world. Just go down there and put your fingers in the water if you don't believe it."

"Then we have made the most wonderful discovery of modern times," declared Bunce.

Frank motioned to Barney in the pilot house. The Celt allowed the air-ship to settle down and rest upon the cliff.

Then the explorers leaped over the rail and ran down to the beach.

CHAPTER XI.

THE MYSTERIOUS SEA.

VON MEYER was the first to reach the water. He put his hand boldly into it.

Then he drew it out with a German oath.

The skin almost peeled from his fingers. He was quite severely scalded, and had to go back to the air ship and have his hand done up in a poultice by Pomp.

Here was certainly one of the greatest wonders of the earth. What was it that made the waters of the open sea so warm?

This was the question which now absorbed the scientists. They explored the shore, analyzed the water, and examined the geological strata.

For some hours they thus spent their time, until finally fatigue induced all to seek slumber.

When the Antarctic morning came, all were awake at an early hour. As they emerged upon deck, Jansen was the first to behold an astounding sight.

"Great Cicero!" he gasped. "Am I dreaming, or can I see—here, Von Meyer, do you see anything over there?"

The German gave a gurgling cry.

"Mein Gott!" he exclaimed. "Vat ish dot? I see some peoples in dat hot vather."

"Eh bien!" exclaimed Vadeau, with upraised hands. "Zey are not human beings!"

Frank and Barney were also at the rail and saw the cause of these remarks. Truly they were well warranted.

For there in the surf of the hot sea a dozen nude forms of human beings were visible.

They were of a race of natives akin to the mountain men. They were nonchalantly enjoying a morning dip.

And our voyagers had found this water to be of a temperature high enough to boil a man alive. They could hardly believe their senses.

"Be jabers, it's tough shkins they must have!" cried Barney.

"Golly! dey am pretty tough sort of peoples!" averred Pomp.

But the naked natives seemed to experience no ill effects. They gamboled and sported in the water as if it was at the normal temperature of seventy degrees.

"That is very queer!" muttered Bunce. "I would suggest, gentlemen, that we go down an investigate."

This was agreed to.

The scientists climbed over the rail and made their way down the cliff.

Now for the first time the bathing natives saw them.

At once they took fright and fled. In a few seconds not one was in sight.

Pacific gestures, conciliating words were all in vain. They did not return.

Somewhat chagrined, however, the scientists approached the spot where they had been taking their dip. Jansen put down one finger and touched the water.

Then he plunged his hand in. He withdrew it unharmed. His face was a study as he turned to his companions.

"Gentlemen," he said, "we were dreaming yesterday; this is a sea of cold water."

Words can hardly express the general astonishment. It needed but a brief experiment to satisfy all that this was the truth.

The Hot Sea was a myth of the past, or it had vanished most mysteriously. The temperature of the water was now hardly seventy.

"By Jupiter!" exclaimed Bunce, in amazement. "Can anyone explain that?"

"I think I can," said Jansen, quietly.

All eyes were upon him.

"This sea is susceptible to some volcanic influence. It may be that it is in a basin which is just over internal fires. These vary in fierceness and at times the water is heated to a boiling point, at others it is cooled by the atmosphere."

This was certainly a logical theory. As there was no other reasonable way to explain the phenomenon it was generally accepted.

Here was certainly the most wonderful feature of the Antarctic region yet discovered. It is needless to say that copious notes were made.

Then Frank suggested that they pursue their journey.

This was agreed to.

All went back aboard the air-ship laden with specimens and much valuable information. Then Frank sent the air-ship aloft.

It was decided to determine the extent of the Hot Sea and give it a thorough exploration. As the air-ship sailed on it could be seen that it was a vast expanse of water, for its farther shore was as yet out of sight.

On sailed the Sky Flyer for hours. The voyagers were all on deck watching for new phenomena, when suddenly Bunce cried:

"Look! A maelstrom!"

Instantly all was excitement.

For some ways back the voyagers had noticed a peculiar rotary movement of the waters of the sea. Jansen had once attributed this to a meeting of conflicting currents.

But now a distant column of steam was seen rising into the air to the height of fifty feet or more.

And about this the waters whirled in a concave, swirling mass, hurrying on madly down into the abyss of the maelstrom.

Here was certainly a marvelous phenomenon. The jets of steam spouting up from the center of the maelstrom explained perfectly well the heating of the waters of the sea.

It was beyond doubt that they came in contact with a heated surface below. This returned the water in undercurrents of varying heat to every part of the sea.

A corked bottle was thrown into the maelstrom and its course watched.

It continued to circle in the whirling current for a long while, and it was fully an hour before it finally disappeared in the vortex.

Jansen's theory was that the maelstrom was very near the center of the lake. He also conceived the belief that there was varying phenomena connected with it, and expressed a wish to remain by it and watch it for a while.

Frank was willing and the air-ship was held stationary within easy distance of the maelstrom.

The Antarctic night had begun to come on, and as all were fatigued it was decided to remain on the spot until the next day. It was reckoned that in twelve hours all the peculiar phenomena of the maelstrom should be developed.

At an early hour Frank arose and met Jansen just coming out of the cabin.

"Good-morning, doctor," said the young scientist.

"Good-morning, Mr. Reade," was the scientist's hearty reply. "I trust you slept well?"

"Indeed, yes," replied Frank; "shall we go on deck?"

"I am bound thither."

Then both came to a full stop. There, sitting near the rail was Barney, sound asleep. He was the last one on watch, Pomp having retired a little after midnight.

Frank's face clouded.

"Barney," he shouted, "what do you mean, you rascal, by being asleep at your post?"

The Celt sprang to his feet much abashed and fully wide awake.

"Shure, Misther Frank, I didn't know it," he cried; "it's sorry I am. Oh, lack-a-day! Phwere have we got to?"

This latter wail was caused by an astonishing sight which now met their gaze. The sea was no longer beneath the air-ship.

It had vanished. Frank's instant conclusion, of course, was that the air-ship had drifted beyond the limits of the great body of water.

He went to the rail and saw a great desolate plain of drenched sand and rock. But the sea was nowhere in sight.

"We have drifted away from it," he cried; "it is not even in sight."

"When did it rain in the night?" asked Jansen.

"Rain?"

"Yes."

"It did not rain!"

"The ground is very wet. And see, there are little puddles of mud and water."

Frank rubbed his eyes.

He stared at the earth and then he gripped the scientist's arm. He was intensely excited.

"Look," he gasped; "do you see? The lake is gone!"

"Gone!" exclaimed Jansen, who adjusted his glasses. "Yes, of course; we have drifted away from it."

"No, not that. We are right on the same spot as yesterday, but the lake has gone, dried up, ran off, or something of the kind."

Jansen gave a mighty start.

"Great Cicero!" he ejaculated; "is that the truth?"

"It is."

"Then this is only another wonderful phenomenon of this region?"

"Just so."

Jansen was so amazed that he could hardly express himself logically.

"Well, I never!" he ejaculated. "Whoever thought it? Where has the water gone?"

"There!"

Frank pointed to the spot where the maelstrom had been. There was a mighty circular concave basin of rock covering several acres.

In its center was a round black hole extending an unknown distance downward.

That the lake had emptied itself by this cavity there was no doubt. The maelstrom might have been caused by a break in the earth's crust, which had carried the waters of the lake into some subterranean chamber.

Truly it was a strange and mysterious thing.

The two men gazed upon the cavity for some while, then Jansen said:

"I would like to go down there."

Frank hesitated.

"Can it be safe?" he asked.

"It is, I think," replied the scientist. "At least I am willing to take the risk."

At this moment the other members of the party came on deck. The scene which followed baffles description.

There was no end of speculation of argument and conjecture. Frank's ears fairly ached, and finally he said to Barney:

"All right. Lower the air ship; we will take a look at the basin of the maelstrom!"

"All roight, sor!"

Barney lowered the air ship and it rested upon the gravel below. Then the excited scientists leaped down from the deck.

They quickly gained the stone basin. It was an immense ledge of granite, and worn as smooth as a mirror.

How long the waters had been circling in it, it was not easy to guess. It was safe to say, though, that it was for a long time.

But now the lake had emptied itself into some deep part of the bowels of the earth would it ever come back? This was the question.

The scientists advanced all sorts of theories. There were as many sides to the subject as there are stars in the sky. The result was that no satisfactory conclusion was arrived at.

But at that moment the party were treated to a bit of terrifying surprise. Suddenly and without warning from the depths of the orifice in the basin there came unearthly sounds.

They were hoarse and gurgling, at times bellowing. The entire basin trembled greatly.

This was enough to cause all to flee with terror to the deck of the air-ship.

CHAPTER XII.

WHICH ENDS THE CHRONICLE.

Nor until they were safely aboard the air-ship did any in the party come to a halt.

Then they were disposed to be much ashamed of their conduct, They burst into laughter.

"Ach, mein Gott!" cried Von Meyer. "I tought der teufel vas after me. Vot vas der trouble?"

"If anybody can explain this new phenomena, I wish they would kindly do so," said Jansen, with a laugh.

"Before we are done with the phenomenon of this strange country, it may do for us," declared Frank.

"Which is true!" agreed Bunce. "We have already seen enough to write a book on!"

The strange noise had now ceased and for a time all was silent.

"Pshaw!" said Jansen. "We are a pack of cowards. Doubtless that was only the internal rumbling of some pent-up volcano. It will hardly do us harm!"

"Mon Dieu!" exclaimed Vadeau, rubbing his hands. "I am ze first man to say enough. Suppose we give up ze search now and defer ourselves mooth to M'sieur Rende?"

Jansen hesitated, but seeing eagerness upon the faces of all, he said:

"Let us sail westward one hundred miles further. If we do not come to the ice barrier then, I will abandon the quest. Or if we do."

"Hurrah!" shouted all.

Frank went into the pilot house and turned the rotoscope lever. The air-ship shot upward.

Once more in the air the spirits of all, which were lately a trifle depressed, began to rise.

The air-ship filled away rapidly to the westward.

Soon the line of a distant coast was seen. Beyond it there was a high ridge of white.

"It is the ice barrier!" declared Frank. "Are you satisfied, doctor?"

Jansen turned from the rail.

He nodded his head.

"I am," he replied. "The sooner we get back to America now the better it will satisfy me."

"Amen!" exclaimed Bunce.

Frank lost no time in changing the course of the air-ship. In a very short time the bed of the lake was left behind.

And its mystery was in part unsolved. Whether it filled up again or not was never known.

Twelve hours of swift sailing brought the voyagers to the high mountain line beyond which was the ice region.

Crossing this it became necessary to don heavy furs. Soon the cold at that altitude was so excessive, that it was dangerous to remain out on deck.

Over mountains and defiles, great glaciers and mighty crevices the air-ship sailed on.

The cold was frightful. Only the excessive heat of an electric disc kept the ice from forming inches thick on the pilot house windows.

But at length the Sky Flyer began to descend to the lower plains. Here the temperature was more merciful.

It even dropped to twenty degrees above. This was considered warm, and the voyagers ventured out on deck.

On over the ice fields the air ship sped.

But while all hands were watching for the open sea, Barney sighted an object among the ice floes which gave all a start.

What appeared to be the mast of a ship seemed to rise above the ice hummocks. The Celt called Frank's attention to it.

"Phwat do yez call it, Misther Frank?" he asked.

The inventor was interested.

"On my word," he declared, "it looks like a vessel nipped in the ice."

"Begorra, it may be, sor. Phwat shall we do?"

"It would be inhuman to go on and make no inquiry as to her welfare," said Frank; "bear down that way, Barney."

The Celt obeyed.

By this time everybody had their gaze upon the distant mast. It was a moment of exciting interest.

It was easy to picture some smart vessel nipped in the ice, and the crew driven to dire resorts. How welcome succor would be!

It was not strange that a vessel should be found in these parts, detained by the ice, for any ship venturing too low beyond the Horn was apt to be caught by wayward storms and driven gradually into those latitudes.

It was almost impossible for a sailing vessel to make headway in the terrific storms which swept those seas sometimes for weeks.

So all more than half expected to find a ship thus laid up beyond the great ice hummocks. And their supposition proved correct.

A boat was suddenly spied among a heap of loose ice cakes. It was a ship's yawl.

And the next moment the air-ship sailed over the hummocks, and there deeply imbedded in the ice was a ship.

It was of the whaling type somewhat ancient in construction, and such as is seldom seen on the seas of to-day.

The mizzen-mast had gone by the board, but the main and fore were standing and their rigging was intact. Even the white sails were in a perfect state of preservation lashed to their yards.

"By Jupiter!" exclaimed Bunce, who was something of a sailor, "is not that an old timer?"

"She is, eh?" asked Jansen.

"Yes."

"It is true," declared Frank. "You seldom see a ship of her class upon the seas to-day."

"But she looks new!" said Jansen. "She cannot have been long in her present position."

Frank laughed quietly.

"We shall see," he said. "How long should you think she had been here, doctor?"

The scientist replied:

"Perhaps a year!"

Frank threw out the rope ladder.

"Come on!" he said, "let us go down and take a look at her."

One by one the party climbed down to the ice floe. Then they climbed onto the ship's deck.

At once they saw that this ship was truly of the old whaling type of fifty years previous. But everything about her was as ship shape and neat as though her crew were yet on deck making sennit or splicing hawsers.

In fact, the visitors looked for the captain to step forth from the cabin and greet them.

But he did not do so.

Crossing the deck, Frank pressed on the cabin door. It yielded readily.

It was fearfully chill and tomb like as they entered, and Jansen remarked:

"They have not had a fire here lately."

"No," replied Frank, dryly; "it is a good while since these walls were heated."

The cabin was a trifle dark, but they soon became accustomed to this. Frank led the way.

The furnishings were those of an ordinary vessel of that class. On the center table were quadrant, sextant, and a huge globe.

There was no sign of a human being here. But Frank led the way into the next cabin, and here the scene changed.

A grawsome sight met the gaze of all. Upon the floor lay a whitened skeleton. All vestige of flesh had passed away.

Beyond was a bunk. In this was the skeleton of a woman and a child.

"The captain and his family!" said Jansen, "they have been a long while dead!"

Beyond they entered the quarters of the crew. Here were found the skeletons of seven men. That they had not been removed was evidence that some disease, perhaps the frightful cold, had killed them all within a short space of each other.

It was a horrible charnel house. After some further exploration, sick at heart, they returned to the first cabin.

Here Frank found the log of the ship.

It was marked:

"The Log of the Ship Hester Dean, of Portland, Maine. Captain Andrew Dean, master; Joel Spence, mate; Sam Bilton, steward, and sixteen men in crew. A. D. 1834."

Frank turned to Jansen.

"What did I tell you?" he said.

"You were right," agreed the scientist; "but let us read."

Frank followed the entries for a time sufficient to explain the fate of the ship.

It seemed that she had been nine months in the South Seas for whaled when a heavy storm drove them among the ice.

The entries were pathetic in the extreme, and told of the hopelessness of the situation and the sufferings of the crew.

The captain made often and touching allusion to his wife and child, of whom he had seemed very fond. Then came the last sad words.

"Hester, my darling wife, and baby Mamie are dead of the terrible heart chills which came upon us in so strange a malady yesterday. I

am the only survivor of the crew. Seven lie dead forward. I dare not go thither to give them burial or to pray over their remains.

"Oh, God! the desolation of this awful moment! It is as if I were the last man upon earth—deserted, alone, and helpless. Oh, Heaven! what awful fate is ours! But I have one happy thought. The icy gripe is at my heart strings already, and the moments are few when I shall be once more with Hester and with baby in another and better world. Farewell to earth, our fate will never be known."

For a moment after Frank read these pathetic lines not a word was spoken. But there was not a dry eye in the crowd.

"What shall we do?" finally whispered Jansen. "Ought they not to have Christian burial?"

"There is no better tomb than this," replied Frank. "They will be as sacredly at rest here as anywhere else upon the face of the earth."

"That is right," agreed Bunce. "We can do no better than to leave them just as we find them."

So they went reverently out and closed the door of this strange tomb. Back to the air-ship they went.

Not until they were many miles from the spot did the cloud of depression lift. Then the open sea burst into view and brought a cheer.

No storm could detain the air-ship in its course, and it rapidly sped on to the northward.

In less than four days land was sighted. It was Cape Horn.

It is safe to say that the stormy old promontory never looked so welcome to mortals before. When the air-ship once more crossed the Straits of Magellan all felt as if they had emerged from a long exile in an icy tomb.

"Whew!" exclaimed Bunce who was usually plain-spoken, "the Antarctic may be all right in its way, but I don't believe that I care to ever visit it again."

"Well, mein goot friend," cried Von Meyer. "I am of your mind too. I would rather go back to mein Vaterland."

This was the unanimous sentiment, and with its expression the subject was dropped. A few months later famous articles appeared in the Scientific Magazines, written by these famous navigators. But no word of approbation for the Polar land was allowed to creep in.

Due credit was given Frank Reade, Jr., for his philanthropic mission in the rescue of the lost navigators. Their fate might never have been known.

Pierre Vadeau went back to Paris, Theodore Bunce to Washington, and Dr. Jansen returned to England to lecture in the great universities.

As for Herr Von Meyer, he was glad to return to the land of "Unser Fritz," where he is to-day, and would not forfeit his pipe and his schooner for the whole Antarctic Land, wonderful as it was.

Frank Reade, Jr., with Barney and Pomp returned to Readestown. The Sky Flyer would never be able to go upon another journey, for its machinery was completely worn out. But Frank regarded this lightly.

"I have an idea on hand at present that will beat aerial navigation," he declared; "when I get it sufficiently matured I will tell you what it is."

And with this promise let us take our leave of him for the present.

[THE END.]

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